ADHD study guide

Active recall & spaced repetition for ADHD

Two techniques beat every other study method in the research: active recall (testing yourself) and spaced repetition (reviewing at increasing intervals). They also happen to fit an ADHD brain perfectly — active, quick-feedback and finishable. Here's how they work and how to use them.

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Active recall: test, don't re-read

Active recall means retrieving an answer from memory instead of passively re-reading it. Every time you pull information out, you strengthen it. Re-reading feels productive but barely sticks — recall is what builds durable memory, and because it's *active* with instant feedback, it holds an ADHD brain's attention far better than a highlighter.

How to do it

- Close the book and write or say everything you remember (the "blurting" method).
- Turn your notes into questions and answer them cold.
- Use flashcards — small, testable chunks the exact size an ADHD brain can finish.
- Do past papers and practice questions.

Spaced repetition: review just before you forget

Spaced repetition means reviewing material at increasing intervals — a day later, then a few days, then a week — timed to just before you'd forget. It works with how memory consolidates and moves information into long-term storage far more efficiently than cramming.

How to do it

- Space reviews out over days rather than one marathon session.
- Bring back what you got wrong more often, and what you know less often.
- Flashcard apps can schedule the intervals for you automatically.

Why these two suit an ADHD brain

Active — retrieval is engaging, so attention has something to grip.
Finishable — cards and questions are small, clear, testable chunks.
Immediate feedback — right/wrong lands instantly, which is the reward hit an ADHD brain needs.
No marathon — spacing replaces the boring all-nighter with short, repeated wins.

Putting it together

1. **Turn notes into questions or cards.** If it can't be tested, it's not ready to study.

2. **Test yourself.** Recall first; only check the answer after you've tried.

3 **Space the reviews.** Increasing intervals, not one cram.

4 **Keep sessions short.** A few focused rounds beat an hour of drifting.

5 **Track what you've mastered.** Visible progress keeps motivation alive.

Common questions

- ▶ **What is active recall?**
- ▶ **What is spaced repetition?**
- ▶ **Are active recall and spaced repetition good for ADHD?**
- ▶ **How do I start using them?**

The two habits worth building

If you change one thing about how you study, make it this: stop re-reading, start testing, and space it out. It's more effective and — because it's active and finishable — far easier for an ADHD brain to actually do.

See it in context in how to study with ADHD, or read the full ADHD field guide.

🔬 Built on research

The information in this guide is grounded in clinical and scientific sources, and the way it is laid out follows published cognitive-accessibility research for people with ADHD and neurodivergent minds:

Key scientific reference: World Federation of ADHD International Consensus Statement — 208 evidence-based conclusions (Faraone et al., 2021, Neuroscience & Biobehavioral Reviews).

- W3C — Making Content Usable for People with Cognitive and Learning Disabilities (COGA)
- Bureau of Internet Accessibility — Making your website more accessible for people with ADHD
- Stéphanie Walter — Neurodiversity & UX: cognitive-accessibility resources
- UserWay — Designing for people with ADHD